

that the principal causes making the age a watershed, from which new streams of social theory descend, lay in another region. Mankind does not reflect upon questions of economic and social organization until compelled to do so by the sharp pressure of some practical emergency. The sixteenth century was an age of social speculation for the same reason as the early nineteenth —because it was an age of social dislocation. The retort of conservative religious teachers to a spirit which seems to them the triumph of Mammon produces the last great literary expression of the appeal to the average conscience which had been made by an older social order. The practical implications of the social theory of the Middle Ages are stated more clearly in the sixteenth century than even in its zenith, because they are stated with the emphasis of a creed which is menaced.

(i)

The Economic Revolution

The religious revolution of the age came on a world aeaving with the vastest economic crisis that Europe had experienced since the fall of Rome, Art and scientific' curiosity and technical skill, learning and statesmanship, the scholarship which explored the past and the prophetic vision which pierced the future, had all poured their treasures into the

sumptuous shrine
of the new civilization. Behind the genii of
beauty and
wisdom who were its architects there
moved a murky,
but indispensable, figure. It was the
demon whom
Dante had met muttering gibberish in the
fourth circle
of the Inferno, and whom Sir Guyon was to
encounter
three centuries later, tanned with smoke
and seared
with fire, in a cave adjoining the mouth of
hell. His
uncouth labours quarried the stones which
Michael
Angelo was to raise, and sank deep in the
Roman clay
the foundations of the walls to be adorned
by Raphael.